

Groups threaten to burn 'Interlok' books
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A coalition of ethnic Indian NGOs have threatened to burn copies of 'Interlok', a literature book used in secondary schools, if the Education Ministry does not withdraw it.

Coalition leader A Vaithilingam said that the book burning will be held during rallies in various parts of Malaysia should the ministry fail to heed the coalition's demand within one week.

"If this book is not withdrawn, we will take drastic measures, we will run a road-show around Malaysia and we will burn the books," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur today.

The coalition is upset because of the way the book portrays the Indian Malaysian community, in particular the men's treatment of their spouses.

Vaithilingam adds that the book also instills the idea among schoolchildren that the Indian and Chinese communities are 'pendatang (immigrants)'.

"It (the book) had made us look bad... it is degrading that we are labeled as paria, that we are poor struggling families and that we are immigrants," he said.

Vaithilingam said that the book, meant for upper secondary students, would be implanting the wrong view of society among schoolchildren.

"If it is fiction, then it's fine... But making it seem real and to make it a literature book for the children to learn? This is not the way," he said.

Does not reflect 1Malaysia

Vaithilingam also urged Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak and his deputy Muhyiddin Yassin, who is also the education minister, to read the book before making any comments.

Vaithilingam added that that the book does not reflect Najib's 1Malaysia concept.

Vaithilingam also said the main contention with the book was not the word 'pariah' itself but because of the Indian stereotypes contained in the book.

"It (Interlok) implies that all Malaysian Indians are off the lowest caste, which is the 'pariah'. But that is clearly not true. So are all Indians 'pariah' just because our ancestors are from mainland?" he asked.

He urged the ministry to vigilantly scrutinise all required reading materials for schools, adding that he was surprised that the book was published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the national language authority.

"It is vital to know how the writer gets it's information and how true it really is...before this, there were several books written by various writers about Indians coming here and the

information was true, so there was no issues. But this (Interlok) is pure lies.

"If we, the country, wants division amongst the races as the main agenda, then by all means, don't withdraw this book", he said.

Thus far, the Education Ministry claims that it will continue to gather feedback from the Indian community before deciding on the fate of the book.

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